



*Together...ReShaping Young Lives"*

DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES

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*News Release*

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**"Still I Rise": The Waxter Painting Collaborative**

***Mural designed and painted by youth unveiled today***

**BALTIMORE, MD**—(March 7, 2007) The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) is pleased to announce today the unveiling of "Still I Rise": The Waxter Painting Collaborative at the Thomas J.S. Waxter Children's Center in Laurel, Maryland.

The mural was created in collaboration with students from the Thomas J.S. Waxter Children's Center. Working with Mr. Joey Tomassoni, from Class Acts Arts and an internationally recognized artist, students were selected to first develop an idea about what they wanted the painting to represent. Mr. Tomassoni provided drawing lessons and facilitated conversation among the youth that led to the theme of the wall painting.

The mural, approximately 4' high X 13' wide, was composed through a collage process, with over-drawing and painting. The painting is imbued with meaning from a two-month process of dialogue, meditation and honest self-assessment through Maya Angelou's words. The mural functions as a collective self-portrait of the young women on the A-Unit of the Waxter Center. The right side of the panel is painted with darker values and cooler colors. The moon represents a night or dark season of life relating to Angelou's words. The image then moves to the left to become brighter, bolder, expressing the hope of rising through more difficult times of life. Color and shape become the core elements that hold the work together formally. A tree in the center expresses growth and transition from one stage of life to another. The sassiness, sadness, confidence and joy depicted in the mural figures are all honest expressions of the young women's lives. Meaningful phrases from Maya Angelou's words are intertwined and placed throughout the composition. The young women find their own faces in the mural, though the imagery is abstracted to an extent that each of us, regardless of gender or ethnicity, can also find a place to rise.

The message contained in this mural is very compelling. It is truly inspiring to see youth who have come from a troubled past recognize that they possess what it takes to rise above their troubles, focus their energies on showing the community they do have something to contribute, and return to their community feeling confident about turning their life around and becoming successful. Not only does the mural represent the creative talent and beautiful artistry but the children are also conveying a message—that they, too, will rise.

The unveiling of the mural will take place today from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. on the grounds of the Waxter Children's Center, 375 Red Clay Road, Laurel, Maryland.

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